

OPALCO's mission is to provide safe, reliable, sustainable and cost-effective essential utility services with a commitment to the utilization of renewable resources and carbon reduction. How does this mission align with your vision for the cooperative and community?

OPALCO's mission aligns well with my vision for the San Juan islands community in several ways. Providing safe, reliable, sustainable, and cost-effective utility services reduces the carbon footprint and supports the community's desire for a clean and healthy environment. By investing in renewable energy sources, OPALCO would be supporting local jobs and reducing the community's dependence on fossil fuels. Together, we can help mitigate the impacts of climate change.

OPALCO's commitment to utilizing renewable resources aligns with the cooperative and community's goals of reducing reliance on nonrenewable energy sources and transitioning towards a more sustainable energy system. By doing so, OPALCO is contributing to a better future for the community and the world at large. Overall, OPALCO's mission aligns with the cooperative and community's values of sustainability, environmental stewardship, and community well-being.

The region is in a period of major energy transformation away from carbon-emitting sources.

- **Where will OPALCO get the capital to invest in required system upgrades and local renewable generators to keep the islands supplied with reliable power during the transition?**
 - While there isn't any silver bullet for securing adequate funding to invest in required system upgrades, there are a number of creative ways that come to mind which may be helpful while thinking outside the box, including:
 - Grants: international, federal, state and local governments or private organizations that support the development of renewable energy projects and infrastructure upgrades.
 - Low-interest loans: OPALCO can secure low-interest loans from financial institutions that specialize in financing renewable energy projects and infrastructure upgrades. Think outside the box, including globally - e.g. World Bank financed projects, etc.
 - Member investment: OPALCO can seek investment from its members through the issuance of bonds or other investment instruments.
 - Rebates and incentives: OPALCO can take advantage of rebates from federal, state and local programs that finance renewable energy projects
 - Partnerships: OPALCO can enter into partnerships with other organizations, such as other energy cooperatives in a cost sharing arrangement, or with private companies or non-profit organizations to finance and develop renewable energy projects and infrastructure upgrades.

- **How should OPALCO maintain affordability for all members while complying with legislation for decarbonization?**
 - With upcoming legislation for decarbonization on the horizon, all utility organizations are struggling to come up with appropriate ways to remain compliant, while remaining affordable for their members. This isn't unique to OPALCO. A few strategies that OPALCO can employ to achieve this goal include:
 - Implement energy efficient measures: OPALCO can help its members reduce their energy consumption and lower their energy bills by implementing energy efficient measures, such as offering rebates for energy-efficient appliances and providing free energy audits and weatherization services.
 - Implement demand response programs: OPALCO can offer demand response programs to incentivize member to reduce their energy consumption during periods of peak demand, which can he reduce the need for expensive energy infrastructure upgrades
 - Encourage distributed energy resources (DERs): OPALCO can encourage the adoption of DERs, such as solar panels, electric vehicles and battery storage systems, which can help to reduce members' reliance on the grid and lower their energy bills.
 - Use renewable energy credits (RECs) and carbon offsets: OPALCO can purchase RECs and carbon offsets to comply with decarbonization legislation without necessarily having to invest in expensive renewable energy infrastructure.
 - Offer flexible rate structures: OPALCO can offer rate structures that are more flexible and responsive to changes in energy usage, such as time-of-use rates, which can help members to better manage their energy bills.
 - Collaborate with other utilities and organizations: OPALCO can collaborate with other utilities to share resources and knowledge, and develop joint projects that can reduce costs and increase efficiency.
 - In general, although the San Juan islands are...islands (no pun intended), I strongly believe that OPALCO should not exist and operate as an island. The world is very interconnected today, and we can easily harness knowledge-bases from different parts of the world, from utilities and communities that are similar to the San Juan islands, and incorporate best practices to meet our energy needs.

Solar power requires a lot of sunny land for solar arrays. Existing county land use codes favor preserving local rural character over solar generators on open land. How do you think about these potentially conflicting approaches to land use?

The conflict between preserving rural character and deploying solar arrays on open land requires a careful balance of competing interests. Preserving rural character is important for maintaining the quality of life and cultural identity of rural communities. However, deploying solar arrays on open land is critical for transitioning to a more sustainable energy system and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

One solution is to promote the use of brownfields, rooftops, and other underutilized areas for solar arrays instead of open land. Repurposing these areas can minimize the impact on rural character while achieving renewable energy goals. Engaging the community in decision-making is another approach. Dialogue with residents, public meetings, workshops, and feedback through surveys can ensure local perspectives are taken into account when making land-use decisions.

Advancements in solar technology, such as solar roofing shingles, can also preserve rural character while harnessing solar energy. Tesla's solar roofing tiles, for example, have the same footprint and form factor as regular roofing shingles, as opposed to large solar arrays on rooftops.

Balancing the need for renewable energy with preserving rural character requires a collaborative and nuanced approach that considers the interests of all stakeholders. By promoting the use of underutilized areas, involving the community in decision-making, and utilizing new solar technologies, we can achieve a more sustainable future while maintaining the rural character of our communities.

OPALCO depends on hydropower from the mainland for more than 84% of its total power supply. How important is hydropower in your vision for a future energy supply in the islands?

Hydropower has been a reliable source of renewable energy for OPALCO for many years, but it's important to consider its long-term viability as a primary source of energy. A diverse mix of renewable energy sources is essential for ensuring reliability and resilience in the face of challenges. Local renewable sources such as solar, wind, tidal and geothermal energy can provide a complementary source of energy to hydropower, and investing in energy storage solutions such as battery storage can help manage the variability of renewable sources. By investing in a diverse mix of renewable energy sources and energy storage solutions, OPALCO can ensure the islands have access to reliable, sustainable, and cost-effective energy.

It's estimated that OPALCO's load growth will double between now and 2050 due to the electrification of heating and transportation. Questions:

- **Where should this new energy come from?**
 - As stated above, new energy should come from a diversity of sources, such as solar, wind, tidal and geothermal energy.
- **Where should new renewable projects be located?**
 - New renewable projects should be located on the islands. This would limit the cost of bringing in power to the island from off-island sources via expensive undersea cable projects.
- **Will local resistance limit siting and permitting?**
 - Perhaps. However, to mitigate this, OPALCO could establish strong partnerships with the counties and localities where it conducts its operations to create a more durable and transparent relationship. Encouraging community engagement and participation can also help reduce opposition to the location and authorization of new projects. Additionally, outreach and education initiatives can be vital in reducing resistance from the community.
- **Who pays for it?**
 - Understandably, these projects are very capital intensive. However, as stated above, there are creative ways that OPALCO can source for capital and investment dollars to embark on these projects in ways that would maintain affordability for its members. Members would also be expected to take on some responsibility for these new projects via gradual rate hikes.

OPALCO's current rate structure collects almost half of the revenue to cover fixed costs through the kWh (energy use) charge. As we become more energy efficient and embrace more renewable energy, OPALCO won't collect enough kWh revenue to cover fixed costs. How would you address this rate structure dilemma?

OPALCO faces a rate structure dilemma that requires balancing competing priorities. The cooperative must generate sufficient revenue to cover fixed costs and provide reliable and sustainable energy while also encouraging energy efficiency and renewable energy use. Shifting the rate structure towards fixed or demand charges could provide a more stable revenue stream while incentivizing efficient energy use. Exploring alternative revenue sources like grants, subsidies, and demand response programs can also diversify income streams. Collaboration between members, stakeholders, and energy experts is necessary to find creative solutions that support the transition to a more sustainable energy system with a fair and sustainable rate structure.

What role should the Co-op play in state and regional public power affairs? How do you see OPALCO influencing public policy and elected officials?

OPALCO should play an active role in state and regional public power affairs by advocating for policies that support the cooperative model and the transition to a more sustainable energy system. OPALCO can influence public policy and elected officials by sharing the cooperative's perspective and expertise on energy issues and participating in public hearings and meetings, submitting comments on proposed regulations or legislation, and building relationships with elected officials and other stakeholders. Participation in regional and statewide public power organizations can also provide opportunities for collaboration and advocacy. Overall, OPALCO should aim to ensure that its members and the wider community have access to reliable, affordable, and sustainable energy for years to come.

The high cost of living in the islands (especially housing) and a very competitive labor pool in the industry has made it challenging to hire and retain staff. What ideas can you offer for hiring and retention of qualified employees?

One idea for hiring and retention of qualified employees is to offer competitive compensation packages, including salary and benefits. This might include offering higher salaries or bonuses to attract top talent, as well as comprehensive benefits packages that provide access to healthcare, retirement savings plans, and other incentives.

Another idea is to offer flexible work arrangements, such as remote work or flexible schedules, to accommodate the unique needs of employees living on the islands. This can help to attract and retain employees who value work-life balance and the ability to work from anywhere.

Additionally, investing in employee training and development programs can help to attract and retain employees who are looking for opportunities to grow and advance their careers. This might include offering continuing education programs, mentorship opportunities, and other career development resources.

Finally, creating a positive and supportive workplace culture can help to foster employee engagement and retention. This might include regular team-building activities, recognition programs for outstanding performance, and open communication channels between management and employees. By creating a supportive and engaging work environment, OPALCO can attract and retain top talent and build a strong team that is committed to the cooperative's mission and values.

ROCK ISLAND:

How important is access to communication technology throughout San Juan County?

Access to communication technology throughout San Juan County is extremely important, particularly as the world becomes increasingly connected and digital. Reliable access to high-speed internet and other communication technologies is essential for residents and businesses to stay connected with one another, access vital services and information, and participate in the global economy.

In particular, access to high-speed internet can help to bridge the digital divide and ensure that all members of the community have equal access to education, healthcare, and other critical services. It can also support the growth of local businesses and the development of new industries, helping to create jobs and economic opportunities in the islands.

Furthermore, reliable communication technology is essential for emergency preparedness and response. In the event of a natural disaster or other emergency, access to communication technologies can help to ensure that residents are able to receive timely and accurate information, coordinate with emergency responders, and stay connected with loved ones.

Overall, access to communication technology is essential for the social, economic, and physical well-being of the San Juan County community, and should be a priority for the cooperative and other stakeholders in the region.

Rock Island provides internet connections to nearly 50% of the OPALCO membership. How should Rock Island and OPALCO prioritize reaching the balance of the membership with access to broadband?

To prioritize reaching the balance of the membership with access to broadband, Rock Island and OPALCO should focus on identifying the areas of greatest need within the cooperative's service area, such as underserved or remote communities with limited access to high-speed internet. They should also prioritize reaching members who are most likely to benefit from improved broadband access, such as small businesses, students, and low-income households.

One strategy for expanding broadband access could be to leverage existing infrastructure, such as OPALCO's electrical distribution network, to deploy broadband infrastructure at a lower cost. This might involve partnering with other stakeholders, such as local governments, to secure funding for broadband expansion projects.

Another strategy could be to prioritize deployment of broadband in areas where there is high demand or interest from members. This might involve conducting surveys or other outreach efforts to gauge interest and identify areas of high demand.

Overall, prioritizing broadband expansion in a way that maximizes impact and benefits the greatest number of members will be key to ensuring that all members have access to reliable, high-speed internet.

Who should pay for the cost of internet connections?

The question of who should pay for the cost of OPALCO's Rock Island internet connections in the San Juan Islands is a complex one that depends on a variety of factors. In general, the cost of providing internet connections is typically borne by the provider, either through subscription fees or other charges. However, the cost of expanding broadband infrastructure, such as building new fiber-optic lines or upgrading existing infrastructure, can be substantial, and may require public or private funding.

One possible approach to funding OPALCO's Rock Island internet connections is to leverage public-private partnerships, in which the government provides funding or other incentives to encourage private investment in broadband infrastructure. Another approach could involve the use of grants, subsidies, or tax credits to support the expansion of broadband infrastructure.

Ultimately, the goal should be to ensure that all members of the community have access to reliable, high-speed internet, regardless of their location or income level. Finding sustainable funding solutions that balance the needs of providers, users, and other stakeholders will be key to achieving this goal.

What would you bring to the Co-op to help Rock Island realize its full vision?

During my sophomore year as a Computer Science & Engineering student, I secured my first tech job as a technical support engineer for a fast-growing Internet Service Provider (ISP) in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. This role provided me with valuable lessons that would later help me in my career as an engineer. Beyond the technical knowledge and experience that I gained, I developed a strong sense of empathy for customers, which has become a fundamental part of who I am.

My experience working for a multinational telecoms giant, Nokia, and building a healthcare technology company in Seattle has also provided me with a deep understanding of the latest broadband technology developments. With my background and skills in the technology and business worlds, I believe I can help Rock Island achieve its full potential. I possess strong strategic thinking, communication skills, financial acumen, and a commitment to community, all of which are essential to the success of Rock Island's vision.